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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/R/MR; IIP/RW; IIP/RNY (FRANK); BBG/VOA; IIP/WEU; AF/PA; EUR/WE (DEBORAH MENNUTI)/P/SP; D/C (MCCOO); EUR/PA (BERBENA); INR/P; INR/EUC; PM; OSC ISA FOR ILN; NEA; WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE; DOC FOR ITA/EUR/FR AND PASS USTR/PA (ANN LUZZATO); USINCEUR FOR PAO; NATO/PA; MOSCOW/PA; ROME/PA; BRUSSELS/PA; USVIENNA FOR USDEL OSCE.

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - MIDDLE EAST IRAQ STATE OF THE UNION

PARIS - THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 03, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. MIDDLE EAST
2. IRAQ
3. STATE OF THE UNION

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

FRONT PAGES ARE FOR THE MOST PART DEVOTED TO THE POPE'S HEALTH AND TO DOMESTIC STORIES, EXCEPT FOR LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION WHICH DEVOTES ITS LEAD TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT AND THE FEBRUARY 8 SUMMIT: "TRUCE AT THE SUMMIT." THE EDITORIAL IS TITLED "BROKEN TABOOS." (SEE PART C)

BECAUSE OF THE TIME DIFFERENCE, REPORTS ON THE STATE OF THE UNION ARE MOSTLY PROJECTIONS ABOUT WHAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE TALKING ABOUT, EXCEPT FOR RADIO FRANCE INTER WHICH CARRIED A COMMENTARY BY BERNARD GUETTA TITLED "THE NEW BUSH." (SEE PART C) THE REPORT IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO IS TITLED "PRESIDENT BUSH'S MAJOR ORALS" WHILE LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION TITLES ITS REPORT "BUSH EXPLAINS HIS STRATEGY FOR A BETTER WORLD." BOTH ARTICLES STRESS THAT "TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS ARE ON THE MEND" AND NOTE SECRETARY RICE'S TRIP AND MAJOR POLICY SPEECH IN PARIS NEXT WEEK. IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION PASCAL RICHE COMMENTS: "THE PRESIDENT KNOWS HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE HIS IMAGE AND WILL TRY TO PRESENT AMERICAN VALUES AND MESSAGES IN A BETTER LIGHT."

THE IRAQI ELECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF IRAQ CONTINUE TO ELICIT COMMENTARIES, PARTICULARLY FROM THE WEEKLY MAGAZINES. IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE POINT NICOLAS BAVAREZ CONTENDS THAT THE ELECTIONS "HAVE IN NO WAY LIFTED THE CONTRADICTIONS RAISED BY THE U.S. INTERVENTION." (SEE PART C) IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR JEAN DANIEL THINKS THAT "WHILE THE ELECTIONS WERE AN UNDENIABLE POLITICAL VICTORY FOR PRESIDENT BUSH, THEY MAY IN THE NEAR FUTURE LEAD TO PASSING THE IRAQI PROBLEM OVER TO THE EUROPEANS."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

MIDDLE EAST

"BROKEN TABOOS"

PATRICK SABATIER IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/03): "IT MAY NOT BE PEACE OR A TRUCE YET, JUST A MOMENT OF DECREASED TENSION. BUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST WORDS CARRY THEIR OWN WEIGHT. THIS DECREASE OF TENSION IS A HUGE PROGRESS, AND THE ANNOUNCED SUMMIT A NEW REASON NOT TO LOSE HOPE, HELPED ALONG BY TWO NEWLY BROKEN TABOOS. THE FIRST BROKEN BY SHARON WITH HIS WITHDRAWAL PLAN FROM GAZA. THE SECOND BY ABBAS WHEN HE SAID THAT THE ARMED INTIFADA WAS A FAILURE AND THAT A RETURN TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION WAS NEEDED. THE CHANCE FOR A TRUCE LIES NOW WITH THESE TWO MEN. THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE ARE SLOWLY FALLING INTO PLACE FOR PEACE, AS THE NEW U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE SAID. BUT EVERYONE MUST PLAY ITS PART. THE U.S., THE EU AND ISRAEL'S ARAB NEIGHBORS MUST GRASP WHAT EVERYONE IS CALLING A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY AND ACT WITHOUT HESITATION TO CONCRETIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY."

"MIDDLE EAST: THE TEST"

JOSEPH LIMAGNE IN REGIONAL OUEST FRANCE (02/03): "FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS, WASHINGTON HAS TRIED TO RE-ENFORCE ITS TIES WITH ITS ALLIES, STARTING WITH THE LESS DOCILE AMONG THEM. DURING HER TOUR OF EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST, CONDOLEEZZA RICE WILL PUT PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THREE OF HER STOPS: GERMANY, TURKEY AND FRANCE, THREE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE COUNTRIES WHICH HAD REFUSED THEIR HELP IN THE AMERICAN WAR IN IRAQ. IT IS NO COINCIDENCE THAT SHE WILL BE GIVING HER SOLE SPEECH ON RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE U.S. IN PARIS. EVERYTHING SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC THE SAME SPIRIT PREVAILS. IF HE KNOWS HOW TO GRASP THIS OPPORTUNITY, PRESIDENT BUSH WILL GIVE HIS SECOND TERM AN ASPECT WHICH IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM HIS FIRST. NOTHING WILL ENHANCE HIS INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AS MUCH AS A DECISIVE AND CONCERTED CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT."

IRAQ

"EURO-AMERICAN RECONCILIATION"

THOMAS DE ROCHECHOUART IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR (02/03): "RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND A LARGE NUMBER OF ITS PARTNERS SEEM TO HAVE IMPROVED SINCE LAST WEEKEND. THE IRAQI ELECTIONS SEEM TO HAVE WORKED LIKE A DETONATOR, WITH THE GERMANS AND THE FRENCH APPARENTLY SET ON HELPING THE U.S. IN IRAQ, JUST AS SECRETARY RICE BEGINS HER TRIP ABROAD."

"IRAQ AND DISENGAGEMENT"

NICOLAS BAVAREZ IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE POINT (02/03): "THE IRAQI ELECTIONS ARE GIVING THE U.S. THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROCLAIM A POLITICAL VICTORY WHICH, BY THE SAME TOKEN, IS HELPING TO HIDE A FAILURE IN STRATEGY. THE IMPOSSIBLE EQUATION REMAINS BETWEEN AN IMPOSSIBLE VICTORY, AN UNACCEPTABLE WITHDRAWAL, AN INEVITABLE AND PROLONGED OCCUPATION AND AN IMPOSSIBLE QUAGMIRE. FAR FROM LEADING IRAQ TO FREEDOM, THE ELECTIONS ARE OPENING THE DOOR TO A CIVIL WAR. NONE OF THE CONTRADICTIONS INHERENT TO THE AMERICAN INTERVENTION HAVE BEEN LIFTED BY THE ELECTIONS, WHICH HAVE ESTABLISHED AN IMPROBABLE COALITION BETWEEN IRAQI NATIONALISM AND ISLAMIC FANATICISM. THE HERALDING OF THE ELECTIONS AS A MAJOR VICTORY IS PART OF THE U.S. PLAN TO PREPARE AND JUSTIFY A DISENGAGEMENT."

STATE OF THE UNION

"THE NEW BUSH"

BERNARD GUETTA ON GOVERNMENT-RUN FRANCE INTER RADIO (02/03): "BUSH IS NO LONGER EXACTLY THE SAME MAN. HE WILL BE A LESS DIFFICULT ALLY FOR EUROPE, WHICH HE HAS NOW LEARNED TO CALL THE EUROPEAN UNION. IN MATTERS OF FOREIGN POLICY BUSH IS SOFTENING THE ANGLES. LIBERTY, WHICH IN HIS INAUGURAL SPEECH BECAME A RHETORICAL LEITMOTIF THAT ELICITED CONCERNS ABOUT NEW MILITARY ADVENTURES, TURNED OUT IN THE SOTU TO BE A 'GUIDING IDEAL' AND A CENTRAL GOAL OF AMERICA'S DIPLOMACY, BUT NOT AN IMMEDIATE WAR OBJECTIVE." LEACH